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Does it matter for us that my partner or I commute?

Spatial mobility for job reasons and the quality of conjugal relationships in France, Germany, and Switzerland

Macht es einen Unterschied für uns, dass mein Partner oder ich pendle? Berufsbedingte räumliche Mobilität und Partnerschaftsqualität in Frankreich, Deutschland und der Schweiz

Abstract:
Spatial mobility has often been considered a detrimental factor for families for various reasons, stemming from increasing stress, unpredictability of daily life, increasing gender inequalities, and decreasing investment in parenting and partnerships due to time and space constraints. This contribution considers how daily long-distance and weekly commuting, frequent absence from home, and long-distance relationships for job-related reasons affect conjugal quality. To investigate this issue, we used data from a large European survey on job mobility and family life (JobMob), based on 2,914 individuals reporting a stable partnership and living in France, Germany, and Switzerland. We first empirically defined eight positions in the social space according to the current mobility practice from each partner and major socio-demographic variables. We then explored the extent to which those positions affect conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict within the three national contexts, complementing the analyses by including the process by which one became mobile. We found that job mobility had no significant effect on conjugal quality. Lower quality of conjugal relations rather concerned mobile people who experienced decisions to become mobile both negatively and collectively. We further discuss the importance of our results for understanding the functioning of contemporary couples facing mobility demands.

Zusammenfassung:
Mit dem Verweis auf erhöhten Stress, Unplanbarkeit des alltäglichen Lebens, verstärkter Ungleichheiten zwischen den Geschlechtern und sinkenden Investitionen in Elternschaft und Partnerschaft angesichts zeitlicher und räumlicher Restriktionen ist berufliche Mobilität häufig als negativer Einfluss auf Familien beurteilt worden. Dieser Beitrag fragt, wie sich tägliches Fernpendeln und Wochenendpendeln, wie sich beruflich bedingte häufige Abwesenheit von zuhause und Fernbeziehungen auf die Partnerschaftsqualität auswirken. Um dieser Frage nachzugehen, verwenden wir Daten aus einer großen europäischen Umfrage zum Thema berufliche Mobilität und Familienleben (JobMob) zu 2.914 Befragten, die angeben, eine feste Beziehung zu haben, und die in Frankreich, Deutschland oder in der Schweiz leben. Zunächst bestimmen wir empirisch aufgrund des aktuellen Mobilitätsverhaltens beider Partner sowie zentraler sozio-demographischer Variablen acht Lagen im sozialen Raum. Danach untersuchen wir, inwieweit diese Lagen in den drei unterschiedlichen nationalen Kontexten Partnerschaftszufriedenheit und Partnerschaftskonflikte beeinflussen. Ergänzend wird der Prozess berücksichtigt, im Zuge dessen Individuen mobil geworden sind. Wir kommen zu dem Ergebnis, dass berufliche Mobilität keinen signifikanten Einfluss auf die Partnerschaftsqualität hat. Eine verminderte Partnerschaftsqualität ist eher charakteristisch für Menschen, die die Mobilitätsentscheidungen als negativ und als kollektiv erlebt

haben. Abschließend diskutieren wir, welchen Beitrag diese Befunde für das Verständnis der Organisation des Beziehungslebens von Paaren haben, die mit Mobilitätserfordernissen konfrontiert sind.

Key words: Job mobility, spatial mobility, long-distance commuting, process of becoming mobile, conjugal quality, family functioning, international comparison

Schlagwörter: berufliche Mobilität, räumliche Mobilität, Fernpendeln, Übergang in die Mobilität, Partnerschaftsqualität, Familienorganisation, internationaler Vergleich

1. Introduction

Spatial mobility has often been considered a detrimental factor for families for various reasons, stemming from increasing stress, unpredictability of daily life, increasing gender inequalities, and decreasing investment in parenting and partnerships due to time and space constraints. This contribution considers how recurring forms of job-related spatial mobility affect conjugal quality and conjugal conflict. Recurring forms of job-related spatial mobility summarise all variations of commuting mobility and of frequent absence from home because of longer business trips and faraway workplaces. To investigate this issue, we used representative data from the "Job Mobility and Family Lives in Europe" (JobMob) project[1] for France, Germany, and Switzerland, three countries with distinct family policies, spatial structures of population, and transport infrastructures. This transnational data enabled us to estimate the reliability and robustness of our results across various contexts, as well as the extent to which macro- and micro-sociological factors contribute to the effect of job mobility on families.

Job mobility as a detrimental factor to conjugal quality?

Previous research has shown that spatial mobility, whatever the form practiced, requires people and their families to adjust and cope with a variety of strains (i.e. Anderson/Spruill 1993; Hardill 2004; Kümmel 2005; Willis/Yeoh 2000). Some studies have more particularly highlighted specific burdens on the partnership linked with job mobility. The study of Schneider et al. (2002) in Germany showed that about one third of people which are highly mobile for occupational reasons declared problems in their relationships caused by a mobile way of life. Problems were particularly frequent in the case of weekend commuters and long-distance relationships. For the most part, they declared having too little time to invest in their relationships, and thus partners increasingly went their separate ways. Mobile people also complained about the lack of spontaneity in their relationships. Their mobile lifestyle allowed them little time to share spontaneous adventures. Conjugal conflicts that are directly related to mobility were, however, rarely mentioned. Interviewees rather referred to spill-over effects, in which the job stress of the mobile persons led to

1 For more information about the survey: www.jobmob-and-famlives.eu

conflicts and quarrels between the partners. In another study of German career soldiers relocating frequently and practicing weekend commuting (Biehl et al. 2005; Collmer 2002, 2005; Wendl 2004, 2005), it was further observed that commuters often feel as a "guest in their own home". To take advantage of their weekends at home with the family, they worked more during the week, leading to increased stress. At the same time, the weekend was often overloaded with leisure activities which caused additional leisure stress. In the case of absence of several months from the family home, partners suffer from the separation. Spouses missed the closeness of family and sexual intimacy and developed a substantial fear of loss, in particular among younger couples (Biehl et al. 2005).

As for research on family functioning, it was highlighted that couples emphasising a high autonomy between partners are more likely associated with a lower quality of conjugal relations (Widmer et al. 2003; 2006). This also prevails for couples having frequent contacts with the outside world. Job mobility could thus affect the quality of conjugal interactions by fostering partners' individual autonomy and personal investments outside of the couple at the expense of similarity of orientations and ideas, time spent together, and consensus. Another important dimension to consider is that conjugal quality is influenced by the characteristics of both partners' social networks. Couples with dense networks characterized by supportive relationships with relatives and friends and both partners' frequent contact with them, present a significantly higher conjugal quality than couples with sparse and asymmetrical networks (Widmer et al. 2003, 2009). Precisely, some pioneer studies revealed that, in the situation of long-distance commuting, mobile people present personal networks which are less dense (Viry et al. 2009) and more centred on the immobile partner than non-mobile people, because contacts outside of the professional environment are unlikely and often delegated to the spouse (Becerril 2003; Schneider et al. 2002; Soriano 2005). By favouring sparse and unicentric networks, as one partner's network is predominant, job mobility could likewise affect conjugal satisfaction.

Little is known about the consequences of recurring forms of job-related spatial mobility on conjugal functioning and conjugal networks and a systematic overview based on representative data and predictive models is missing. Although it is empirically proven that, firstly, a strong orientation toward partners' autonomy and, secondly, sparse and asymmetrical conjugal networks have negative effects on couples, proof of such effects for job mobility are currently lacking. Based on the literature, we hypothesize that job mobility is associated with poorer conjugal interactions as it decreases couple cohesion, network density, and network symmetry between the two partners.

Mediating effects on the relationship between job mobility and conjugal quality

However, several other processes may interact with the impact of job mobility on conjugal relationships at the micro, meso, and macro levels and make this impact less widespread than expected. Overall, job mobility practices seldom have a general effect on all individuals in the same way and its impact on conjugal quality may concern some social categories more specifically. A variety of factors, such as life course, social policy, and cultural meanings can play a mediating effect on the way in which job mobility influences couple cohesion, couple networks, and herewith conjugal quality.

The mediating effect of the mobility form

First of all, job mobility actually covers a variety of situations which may have distinct consequences for conjugal functioning and conjugal networks. Previous research indeed has stressed the importance of making a distinction between various forms of mobility (Limmer 2005; Schneider et al. 2002). Because of absence during the week, weekend commuters, persons on frequent business trips, and people in long-distance relationships for job-related reasons are more likely to emphasise partners' autonomy than daily long-distance commuters. In some cases, the irregularity and unpredictability concerning the time and duration of absence could also reinforce individual autonomy, because couple routines would be more difficult to implement. Concerning social networks, daily and weekend commuters have fewer contacts outside of the professional environment, and such contacts are more delegated to the immobile partner than people in long-distance relationships (Schneider et al. 2002). Rather than measuring the impact of job mobility as a homogeneous category, a careful empirical examination of the consequences of its various types should then be done before any conclusion can be drawn. Moreover, by choosing the form of mobility that is most adapted to their degree of autonomy, couples may potentially lessen the impact of job mobility on conjugal quality.

The mediating effect of the life course

Empirical research additionally shows that much job mobility happens in the early life stages of adulthood, especially to single persons or individuals with short-term intimate relationships early in their professional careers. This corresponds to the stage of life in which individuals have not yet had children. As conjugal quality typically decreases when partners become parents (Belsky/Pensky 1988; Cowan/Cowan 1992), the impact of job mobility on conjugal quality might be weaker than expected, especially in life stages where partners are not yet parents. Indeed, previous research has shown that childless couples already place stronger emphasis on individual autonomy as a leading value (Widmer et al. 2003). Therefore, they may adapt more easily to the demands of job mobility than older couples, who have to face the constraints associated with parenthood in terms of unequal division of household labour and time and interests to be spent in common. What is proposed here is the inclusion of the life course as an intervening variable between job mobility and conjugal quality. Based on previous analyses (Viry et al. 2008), we have reason to believe that job mobility is less likely practiced in situations where young children are involved. Moreover, because job mobility is strongly gendered (with males much overrepresented), only few women with children are job-mobile. This organization of family life may actually insulate a majority of couples from the burdens associated with job mobility.

The mediating effect of the process by which one becomes mobile

In a life course perspective, it is also necessary to take the ways in which one has become job-mobile into account. The hypothesis that all individuals make personal decisions which optimize their preferences in the mobility realm is not supported by empirical evidence (Widmer et al. 2010). Various processes by which individuals become mobile co-

exist. Some individuals are constrained by the structural dimensions of their environment to become mobile (lack of job opportunities in the area of residence, etc.) and consider the process by which they have become mobile very negatively. Others, while emphasizing the negative dimension of the situation, see it as a personal decision. Social psychology stresses the importance of self versus hetero attributions of responsibility as a main way of achieving self-worth (Rotter 1966). It is likely that the ways in which the process of becoming mobile is experienced by individuals have consequences for conjugal quality. We expect that individuals who consider that their mobility is a consequence of their own choice and who see it positively cope better with the constraints associated with job mobility on conjugal interactions (lower couple cohesion, sparse and asymmetrical conjugal networks) and have thus a higher conjugal quality than those who see it as a consequence of their context (including their interpersonal relationships, of which their partner is central) and who perceive it negatively.

The mediating effect of the social embeddedness

Former analyses have shown that the position and resources of individuals in the social space significantly shape their mobility practice, mobility perceptions, and mobility consequences in tilting the balance of constraints and opportunities (Schneider/Meil 2008; Widmer et al. 2010). In particular, people with high levels of educational and economic resources are more likely to follow a social mobility trajectory which requires them to be spatially mobile in order to get a high-value job, often concentrated in metropolitan areas. Moreover, these individuals are more often employed in occupations that require inherently high mobility practices (business trips, consulting, airline pilot, etc.), where being mobile makes more sense and is better perceived than in other settings. Conversely, more disadvantaged individuals are more often mobile because of precarious working situations and higher constraints in their residential choices (work contracts of limited duration, settlements in peripheral areas and on the outskirts of urban centres, etc.), which can lead to more problematic situations (Baccaini 1994; Kaufmann et al. 2001). Additionally, among households with modest economic means and low educational credentials, both partners are more forced to work full-time, either for survival reasons or as a way to promote a middle-class lifestyle. The resulting commuting forms are then more likely to be problematic for conjugal functioning and conjugal networks than in the case of a well-heeled dual-career couple that decides to work and commute on an upward career trajectory (Challiol/Mignonac 2005). Furthermore, there is evidence that spatial mobility is differently experienced by men and women. Permanent forms of spatial mobility, such as daily or weekly commuting, are pre-eminently practiced by men (Limmer 2004, Schneider/ Meil 2008). The gendered division of labour, with women still mainly responsible for housekeeping and children, as well as the set of gendered norms and constraints internalised by men and women, mainly explain the weak mobility rate and mobility willingness among women. Because of the strains between family tasks and job responsibility, job-related mobility is more likely to be experienced in a problematic way by women, in particular mothers, than by men. In conclusion, because mobility is more burdensome for women and people with low educational and economic resources, we expect that they will have a lower conjugal satisfaction and more frequent conjugal conflicts than mobile men

and mobile people with high resources. Previous research has nevertheless shown that job mobility is predominantly associated with highly-qualified people. Because these people already place higher emphasis on individual autonomy than less qualified persons (Widmer et al. 2003), the overall impact of job mobility on conjugal quality may therefore be limited.

The mediating effect of the national context

In a macro-sociological perspective, additional factors are likely to intervene. Indeed, the impact of job mobility on conjugal functioning and conjugal networks is likely to be weakened or increased depending on social policies, especially those which deal with families. Stemming from Esping-Anderson's typology of welfare states (1990), Fux (2002) stresses the presence of three distinct types of family policies which may interact quite distinctly with job mobility. Social democratic regimes characterized by a strong central government (e.g., Scandinavian countries, to a lesser extent France) promote gender equality and universal coverage of needs for citizens; they do not promote one type of family situation (e.g., married couples and their children) over another one (e.g., single-parent family). Quite distinctly, familialistic regimes (e.g., Portugal, Italy, Spain, West Germany) consider it their task to support the nuclear family – but not to take the place of it – within a logic of subsidiarity which seeks to promote the inner strength of families. The role of women as mothers is stressed rather than their independence as individuals. Finally, liberal family policies (e.g., the United States, UK, Switzerland) stress the separation of family issues and policy issues. Individuals are considered fully responsible for the way in which they organize their family lives, and the state should not interfere with individual decisions either by regulating or by subsidizing any family arrangements. Families are more dependent on the economic market in that latter case than in the two former cases. These three approaches of family life by state policies are likely to have consequences for the impact of mobility on conjugal quality. Indeed, in liberal systems, couples are left by themselves to face the burdens associated with mobility so that the partners' autonomy and the decrease of social integration could be more marked. In familialistic systems, only gendered organizations receive some resources from the state, whereas in social democratic systems, alternative family forms (such as living apart together) may get some attention from legislators. Note, however, that family policies only intervene when children are at stake. Since job mobility mostly takes place before the arrival of children, their influence on conjugal quality may be limited.

In addition to family policies, a whole series of contextual factors relating to space likewise may influence the quality of conjugal relations between mobile individuals. To begin, let us mention the quality of the amenities in residential neighbourhoods that serve as recreational facilities for both preschoolers (day cares) and school-age children (after-school programs, supervised study halls, recreation centres). Such facilities are pivotal to quality of life insomuch as they relieve activities schedules of the non-mobile partner when children are present in the household. Generally speaking, the quality of transportation systems (their reliability, etc.) naturally influences conjugal relations (Kaufmann/ Widmer 2006). For example, comfortable, regular, and frequent high-speed rail service allows individuals to control and limit the impact of mobility on their personal lives and

the lives of those close to them; conversely, a mediocre system naturally introduces temporal questions that are difficult for mobile individuals and their families to handle on a day-to-day basis (Kaufmann et al. 2010).

Finally, it is worth noting that the spatial structure of a country or region's population dispersal can also affect the quality of conjugal relations by influencing the form under which mobility is practiced. Two ideal types can be differentiated in this domain: the first is countries with a *Rhineland*-type spatial structure (such as Rhineland Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland), which are characterized by a predominance of medium-sized urban agglomerations (100,000 to 500,000 inhabitants) roughly 50 to 100 kilometres apart – in other words, a framework that favours long-distance commuting. The second is centralized countries with a dominant capital, where agglomerations are spread out (France or Spain, for instance) – in other words, a framework that favours overnighting and long-distance relationship practices (Kaufmann et al. 2010). We therefore expect that individuals living in a national context with a state-based regime and high-quality transport infrastructures cope better with the burdens associated with job mobility on conjugal interactions and have thus a higher conjugal quality than those living in a national context characterized by weak family policies and poor transport amenities.

Based on the literature, we hypothesize that job mobility has an effect on conjugal quality because it affects couple cohesion and social integration. However, we also expect that the impact of job mobility is distinct according to the type of mobility, some mobility types being more demanding to family life than others. Mobility is moreover one dimension of the position of individuals in the life course and the social space. Indeed, job mobility has quite different consequences according to the family life stage and the social embeddedness (income, sex, and level of education) of individuals. By the same token, job mobility is very much correlated with those dimensions (Schneider/Meil 2008). Therefore, rather than testing the effect of mobility independently from other dimensions, we will consider in the analyses below how types of social positions (including mobility of both partners) influence conjugal quality. This static approach of mobility will be complemented by taking the process by which one becomes mobile as well as the national context into account.

2. Data

The data are drawn from the European project "Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe" (JobMob), which is the first large quantitative European survey studying the interactions between family life, professional career, and all forms of job-related high mobility (daily and weekly long-distance commuting, frequent business trips, migration, etc.). All respondents aged 25–54 were selected by random method and questioned by phone on the basis of a standardized questionnaire in six European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, and Switzerland). Spatially mobile people were additionally oversampled. For the present study, data from France, Germany, and Switzerland were used. Although sharing similar economic development, these three countries feature contrasting realities in terms of social policies, gendered division of labour, mobility culture, transport infrastructures, and spatial structure of population (see above). This diver-

sity of contexts ensures a high degree of reliability and robustness of findings, as well as possible interpretations of national differences according to these specificities.

The unweighted sample is composed of 2,914 persons from the three national contexts aged 25–54 who mentioned a steady life-partner. Two different weighting procedures were applied. The first procedure created a sample with equal national sample size and adjusted for response, household size, and oversampling of mobile people biases. The representative (weighted) sample so obtained is composed of 2,188 persons. For analyses on mobile people only, a second weighting procedure eliminated non-mobile people and adjusted for response and household-size biases. This (weighted) sample includes 779 mobile persons. All sample sizes mentioned in the following tables are weighted.

3. Measures

Five dimensions are central in this research: mobility, positions in the social space, mobility processes, conjugal conflict, and conjugal quality.

Types of mobility

Three recurring forms of job-related spatial mobility were considered. The first one is composed of the daily long-distance commuters, defined by a trip to the workplace of at least 2 hours for travelling back and forth at least three times a week. The second category includes all forms of commuting that include staying away overnight (at least 60 nights a year). This category is relatively heterogeneous, because it includes people who hold jobs which require frequent and often irregular business trips (representatives, flight crews, international truck drivers, and so on), seasonal workers, and weekly commuters with a second residence near the workplace. Finally, the third type refers to people in long-distance relationships. These couples do not have a common household due to job-related reasons. Both partners maintain an apartment of their own, characterized by a travelling duration between them of at least 1 hour. Fifteen percent of men and five percent of women from the representative sample are mobile in one of these forms; 36% of men and 29% of women were in the past. For both genders, the bigger mobility category is the daily long-distance commuters (5%), followed by the overnighters (4%), and the long-distance relationships (1%), whereas 0.5% combine two mobility forms. The percentages are similar across the three national contexts.

Mobility processes

The process of becoming mobile was measured for mobile people only. We focused on two dimensions of this process (Widmer et al. 2010). The first dimension includes the particular circumstances under which the decision of becoming mobile was made. Five indicators were used: the encouragements and discouragements from the close network, the degrees of freedom and difficulty of the decision making, and the respondent's opin-

ion about whether the same decision would be made again today. The second dimension refers to the current perception of the practised mobility form. Three indicators were used here: the perceptions of the mobile individuals themselves, on a scale going from "something good and positive" to "something problematic and negative", the perceptions of their close relatives and friends on the same scale, and finally their opinion about how they think of their mobility: "as an opportunity, a need, or a coercion".

Conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict

Conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict were measured with one indicator each. Respondents were asked how satisfied they were with their partnership. Possible answers were "very dissatisfied", "somewhat dissatisfied", "somewhat satisfied", and "very satisfied". In order to have a dichotomous variable, the first three modalities were grouped together, distinguishing between very satisfied people and others. Sixty-two percent of men and 59% of women were very satisfied with their partnership. For conjugal problems, respondents had to indicate how often they felt stressed because of conflicts with their partner in the past 3 months. Responses were "never", "seldom", "sometimes", "often", and "very often". We distinguished between people having conflicts sometimes or more often than others. Twenty-two percent of men and 25% of women mentioned some conjugal conflicts.[2]

4. Results

We first made a preliminary analysis crossing mobility types with conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflicts through bivariate statistics. We then constructed eight types of positions in the social space and four types of processes of becoming mobile, including mobility of both partners. We next investigated the impact of the positions in the social space and the processes of becoming mobile on conjugal quality and conjugal conflict using several logistic regression models.

Mobility types and positions in the social space

In order to measure the impact of various forms of recurring mobility on conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict, bivariate analyses were run (*Table 1*). Multi-mobiles are defined as people who are mobile in more than one of the three forms of current mobility.

2 The satisfaction rate was strangely much lower in France compared with Germany and Switzerland (51% compared to 66% and 62%, respectively). Similarly, the proportion of conflict is higher (30% compared to 20% for the two other countries).

Table 1: Conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict by mobility types (in %)

	Long-distance commuters	Overnighters	Long-distance relationships	Multi-mobile	Non-mobile	Total	Cramer's V
Conjugal satisfaction							.029
Else	36	38	50	40	40	40	
High satisfaction	64	62	50	60	60	60	
Total (N)	100 (118)	100 (79)	100 (18)	100 (10)	100 (1955)	100 (2180)	
Conjugal conflict							.015
Never or seldom	77	78	82	80	77	77	
Sometimes or more	23	22	18	20	23	23	
Total (N)	100 (120)	100 (79)	100 (17)	100 (10)	100 (1954)	100 (2180)	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Source: Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe 2007, weighted. The weight correction was used to create equal national sample sizes and adjust for response, household size, and oversampling of mobile people biases.

The analyses revealed that mobility types had no effect on conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflicts. Only individuals in long-distance relationships (unweighted n = 60) were somewhat less likely to be very satisfied with their partnership and had less frequent conflicts compared with other categories of mobile people and non-mobile people.

As mobility forms were not significantly different from each other in terms of their associations with conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict, we aggregated the three mobility types in a unique category of currently mobile people in order to gain statistical power in multivariate analyses. Moreover, because mobility practice is strongly interlinked with the social embeddedness of individuals (sex, family life-course, level of education and income, residential context), we constructed a typology of positions in the social space, including the mobility of the respondent and that of the partner. The positions were then used as predictors of conjugal quality in a statistical model, instead of successive single variables, characterised by a strong collinearity and confounding effects. In this perspective, we considered the method of cluster analysis.

Cluster analysis makes it possible to go beyond specific dimensions and to find holistic configurations of variables in interaction (Everitt 1993; Lebart et al. 1997). Rather than describing each case by a single variable at a time, it builds types that show how socio-demographic variables interact with each other in specific types of social positions. Note that the interpretation of clusters is based on the comparison of scores across clusters (see *Table 2*). We used a principal component analysis followed by a hierarchical cluster analysis with the Ward's method and squared Euclidean distances on factor scores[3] drawn from the mobility practice of both partners and socio-demographic variables. For all variables to have equal weights in the factor analysis irrespective of their number of response categories, we standardized them by dividing them by their maximum value in order to obtain scores ranging from 0 to 1. A series of solutions was examined, and the final eight-category choice was made on the basis of empirical criteria for purposes of clarity, parsimony, and homogeneity and because of the representation of all the main dimensions un-

3 The factor scores were weighted by the eigenvalue of each factor.

derlined by the factor analysis in the eight groups. Profiles of final groupings are presented in *Table 2*.

Table 2: Types of positions in the social space (means)

	Non-mobile men living with partner & children low re-sources I	Non-mobile men living with partner high re-sources II	Non-mobile women living with partner & children low re-sources III	Non-mobile women living with partner & children high re-sources IV	Persons living without partner without children V	Mobile persons living without mobile partner, without children high re-sources VI	Mobile men living with partner VII	Women living with mobile partner & children high re-sources VIII	Total	Anova
Size of Cluster (%)	22	20	27	11	8	1	6	5	100	
N	353	322	420	172	133	19	92	80	1591	
Socio-demographic characteristics										
Sex (Male)	.97	.93	.00	.03	.68	.47	.96	.28	.54	790.05**
Living with partner	1.00	1.00	.99	1.00	.38	.00	1.00	.98	.93	389.21**
Living with children	.53	.32	.54	.59	.08	.11	.37	.49	.44	22.50**
Education	.36	.78	.41	.80	.57	.69	.57	.71	.56	118.70**
Partner's education	.14	.65	.10	.85	.39	.53	.34	.61	.37	140.43**
Household income	.22	.60	.20	.61	.16	.15	.49	.64	.37	81.80**
Municipality size	.13	.41	.19	.24	.60	.52	.18	.19	.26	44.67**
Mobility										
Mobility	.00	.00	.00	.00	.20	1.00	.96	.39	.10	535.59**
Partner's mobility	.00	.00	.08	.00	.15	1.00	.04	.81	.09	230.18**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Source: Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe 2007, weighted. The weight correction was used to create equal national sample sizes and adjust for response, household size, and oversampling of mobile people biases.

The first type was composed of non-mobile men living with non-mobile partners and children (22% of the sample). Both partners had low credentials and incomes and lived in very small municipalities. Individuals from the second group (20% of the sample) were again non-mobile men living with non-mobile partners, but in this case, they were less likely to live with children and had high levels of income and education. Moreover, their places of residence were located in quite large municipalities. Individuals from cluster three (27% of the sample) were non-mobile women living with non-mobile partners and children in small municipalities. Their educations, as well as that of their partners, were low, like their household incomes. Women from the fourth type (11% of the sample) had the same characteristics as the previous group, except for education and income levels, which were high for both partners. Quite distinctly, individuals from the fifth cluster (8% of the sample) were mainly characterized by the fact of living alone. They were more likely young people in a pre-child situation with a low household income and a residence in a big city. They were more often male and some of them were mobile and/or had mobile partners. As in the previous type, individuals from cluster six (1% of the sample), were more likely young people living alone, but in this case both partners were mobile.

They presented a high level of education and lived more often in large municipalities. This social position concerned only a very small proportion of the weighted sample. These couples were nevertheless kept as a specific category, because of their particular bi-mobile living arrangement. The seventh group (6% of the sample) was composed of mobile men living with non-mobile partners in small municipalities. Finally, women from the last category (5% of the sample) were mainly defined by the mobility of their partners. In some cases, they were themselves mobile. They lived with partners and children and had high levels of education and income. Their residences were located in small municipalities.

Cluster analysis revealed eight contrasted positions in the social space. There were great variations among those types in terms of education and income levels, gender, and living and mobility arrangements. In particular, there was no specific type of mobile women living with non-mobile partners. Mobile women were either living alone in a pre-child situation (clusters five and six) or living with a mobile partner and children (cluster eight).

The frequency distribution of the eight positions was similar across countries (table not reported). Germany was somewhat distinct with an over-representation of individuals living alone and lower proportions of non-mobile men and women living with non-mobile partners and children. Furthermore, men in France experienced less mobility with non-mobile partners, and women in Switzerland were less likely to live with mobile partners and children.

The processes of becoming mobile

The same clustering procedure as for the positions in the social space was followed to build types of processes. From the mobile subsample, a principal component analysis was first used, followed by a hierarchical cluster analysis with the Ward's method and squared Euclidean distances on factor scores[4] drawn from all variables regarding the decision to become mobile and the perception of the practiced mobility form, presented previously. For all variables to have equal weights in the factor analysis irrespective of their number of response categories, we standardized them by dividing them by their maximum value in order to obtain scores ranging from 0 to 1. Four clusters were chosen because of a clear shift of the decrease in the inter-cluster distances identified by the dendrogram between four and five groups and because of the representation of all the main dimensions underlined by the factor analysis in the four groups. Two oppositions which were underlined by the two main axes of the factor analysis structured the cluster. Profiles of final groupings are presented in *Table 3*.

4 The factor scores were weighted by the eigenvalue of each factor.

Table 3: Types of processes (means)

	Structurally enforced negative process	Network-enforced negative process	Network-enforced positive process	Opportunity driven process		
	I	II	III	IV	Total	Anova
Size of Cluster (%)	48	17	12	23	100	
N	412	147	100	199	858	
Decision to become mobile						
Encouragements	.08	.60	.94	.50	.37	178.75**
Discouragements	.02	.43	.86	.07	.20	276.58**
Perceived decision: easy	.82	.40	.52	.91	.74	111.23**
Perceived decision: free	.85	.72	.89	.96	.86	23.24**
Same decision again today	.83	.61	.82	.94	.82	44.90**
Perception of mobility						
Perception from the others: positive	.36	.33	.68	.81	.49	134.32**
Self-perception: positive	.56	.43	.76	.93	.65	108.62**
Self-thinking: opportunity	.53	.43	.79	.88	.62	110.75**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Source: Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe 2007, weighted. The weight-correction was used to create similar national sample size and adjust for response and household size biases.

In the type *structurally-enforced negative process* (53% of the sample of mobile respondents), the decision to become mobile was made by individuals without reference to their relational contexts. Network members had neither encouraged nor discouraged individuals to become mobile. The structural components of the social situation were rather viewed as the main factors (lack of job opportunities in the area of residence, lack of affordable accommodation near the workplace, etc.). Mobility was experienced for the most part as negative and compulsory: individuals would have liked to stop it if they could have done so.

Individuals featuring a *network-enforced negative process* (18% of the sample) were also extremely critical about their mobility practice, which they experienced as a need or a constraint. In their case, however, the decision was made collectively, with family and network members strongly intervening in the decision of individuals to become mobile. Although network members perceived the mobility of respondents mainly negatively, they intervened in contradicting ways, some promoting mobility and some being critical of it. Therefore, the decision to become mobile was difficult to make and individuals did not know at the time of the interview if they would make it again. As in the previous type, individuals experienced mobility as a coercion and were not motivated to continue it if not forced by external circumstances or by network members. One illustrative case of this process is an individual who decided to commute against his or her will because the partner refused to move.

Quite distinctly, individuals of cluster 3 (8% of the subsample) considered mobility as an opportunity rather than as a constraint and wished to continue it in the future. As in cluster 2, the decision to become mobile was made after network members voiced their opinions, either negatively or positively. Therefore, the decision was again not easy to make. The outcome of mobility, however, was extremely positive. Therefore, we call this type *network-enforced positive process*. One illustrative case of this process is an individual in a dual-career relationship who decided to take a second residence near the job location after difficult negotiations because it enables both partners to combine two different workplaces.

Finally, cluster four (21% of the subsample of mobile individuals) features a decisional process in which individuals got strong support from their network members and no negative opinion about mobility. The decision was rather easy to make and led to positive outcomes which enticed individuals to remain mobile in the future. Therefore, one may refer to this type of process as an *opportunity-driven process*.

Overall, the cluster analysis revealed four contrasted types of decisions leading to mobility. Three processes of the four implied a pressure from the environment, either structural or relational, to become mobile.

The four process types were quite similarly distributed among the three countries of residence (table not reported). Mobile people from Germany showed, however, some dissimilarities, as they more often experienced structurally and network-enforced negative processes, whereas they were half as likely to have experienced an opportunity-driven process compared with mobile people in the two other countries (15% as compared to 27% in France and 30% in Switzerland).

Accounting for conjugal quality

We next examined if the positions in the social space and the processes of becoming mobile predicted conjugal quality. *Table 4* presents the results of a set of logistic regressions with conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict regressed on the positions in the social space and the processes leading to mobility, separately in the three national contexts. Two models were tested. In model A, the impact of positions was estimated, while in model B, the processes were added. In the latter model, the regression was applied on the mobile subsample only, so that the four positions characterized by non-mobility were not included in the analysis. Mobile men living with non-mobile partners and the network-enforced negative process were used as the reference categories.

Table 4: Logistic regressions of conjugal satisfaction and conjugal conflict on position and process types (*Odds Ratios*)

	Conjugal satisfaction A	Conjugal satisfaction B	Conjugal conflict A	Conjugal conflict B
France				
Position types in the social space				
Non-mobile men living with partner & children low resources	1.25		1.08	
Non-mobile men living with partner high resources	1.01		1.50	
Non-mobile women living with partner & children low resources	1.22		2.16	
Non-mobile women living with partner & children high resources	1.01		1.49	
Persons living without partner without children	.61	1.25	1.39	1.66
Mobile persons living without mobile partner without children high resources	.75	.59	1.37	1.40
Mobile men living with partner	–	–	–	–
Women living with mobile partner & children high resources	1.18	.48*	2.77	1.61
Process types of becoming mobile				
Structurally enforced negative		1.29		.26**
Network-enforced negative	–	–	–	–
Network-enforced positive		2.36		.62
Opportunity driven		1.79		.49

	Conjugal satisfaction A	Conjugal satisfaction B	Conjugal conflict A	Conjugal conflict B
Fit of the model (χ^2)	3.50	13.00*	11.43	12.54*
Degrees of freedom (D*f*)	7	6	7	6
N	618	239	619	239
Germany				
Position types in the social space				
Non-mobile men living with partner & children low resources	.92		.96	
Non-mobile men living with partner high resources	.88		1.14	
Non-mobile women living with partner & children low resources	1.08		1.14	
Non-mobile women living with partner & children high resources	.79		1.56	
Persons living without partner without children	.82	1.19	1.39	.95
Mobile persons living without mobile partner without children high resources	.69	.38*	1.14	2.00
Mobile men living with partner	–	–	–	–
Women living with mobile partner & children high resources	1.24	1.18	.65	.80
Process types of becoming mobile				
Structurally enforced negative		2.15*		.32**
Network-enforced negative	–	–	–	–
Network-enforced positive		1.25		.79
Opportunity driven		6.89**		.20*
Fit of the model (χ^2)	1.71	15.21**	2.57	10.75
Degrees of freedom (D*f*)	7	6	7	6
N	463	231	464	231
Switzerland				
Position types in the social space				
Non-mobile men living with partner & children low resources	.73		.46	
Non-mobile men living with partner high resources	1.11		.96	
Non-mobile women living with partner & children low resources	.90		.54	
Non-mobile women living with partner & children high resources	.67		.77	
Persons living without partner without children	1.35	1.84	.58	.50
Mobile persons living without mobile partner without children high resources	1.25	1.27	.94	1.56
Mobile men living with partner	–	–	–	–
Women living with mobile partner & children high resources	1.17	2.19	1.01	.29
Process types of becoming mobile				
Structurally enforced negative		3.08**		.22**
Network-enforced negative	–	–	–	–
Network-enforced positive		4.27*		.13**
Opportunity driven		4.42**		.28**
Fit of the model (χ^2)	5.28	13.31*	7.77	16.83**
Degrees of freedom (D*f*)	7	6	7	6
N	506	192	507	193

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Source: Job Mobilities and Family Lives in Europe 2007, weighted. In model A, the weight correction was used to create similar national sample sizes and adjust for response, household size, and oversampling of mobile people biases. In model B, the weight correction created similar national sample sizes and adjusted for response and household size biases.

The odds ratios measure the strength of the association between the conjugal quality (dependent variable) and the position and process types (independent variable). When the coeffcient is below one, the association is negative. When it is above one, the association is positive.

Results from model A showed that the positions in the social space predicted conjugal satisfaction and, conjugal conflict in none of the three countries. In other terms, controlling for repondents' social embeddedness (life course, sex, education etc.), spatially mobile people do not differ from non-mobile ones in their conjugal satisfaction and their conjugal conflict. With the inclusion of processes (model B), it appeared that bi-mobile couples not living together in Germany and mobile women living with mobile partners and children in France were less satisfied compared with mobile men living with non-mobile partners, who constituted the reference category. But the most significant results concerned the impact of mobility processes. The analyses confirmed that the network-enforced negative process was associated with lower conjugal satisfaction and more frequent conjugal conflicts in Germany and in Switzerland, irrespective of the individuals' position in the social space. In Switzerland, mobile people who experienced one of the three other processes featured higher conjugal quality than people who experienced a network-enforced negative process. In Germany, people who experienced an opportunity-driven or a structurally enforced negative process presented higher conjugal satisfaction and fewer conjugal conflicts than others. In these two countries then, it was not the fact of being mobile that influenced conjugal quality but the process by which individuals entered a mobile way of life. This situation was different in France, where no significant effect of mobility processes on conjugal satisfaction was observed. In this country, only mobile people who experienced a structurally enforced negative process had a lower chance of feeling stressed because of conflicts with their partners.

5. Discussion

Based on the literature, we hypothesized that job mobility had a negative impact on conjugal quality because it promoted higher individual autonomy and lower network density, which were shown to be predictors of conjugal dissatisfaction in various studies (see e.g. Widmer et al. 2006, 2009). The empirical results showed that this hypothesis should be rejected on the basis of the JobMob data. We first considered job mobility per se by differentiating the impact of various mobility arrangements that were stressed by former research. We found that none of the mobility types were associated with lower conjugal satisfaction or more frequent conjugal conflicts than the non-mobile situations. In order to take into account the correlations existing between mobility and other dimensions of individual positions in the social space, we constructed a typology of the social space based on cluster analysis. This enabled us to capture the complex set of interacting variables characterizing the social embeddedness of job mobility in contemporary Western societies better than by using a long set of supposedly independent variables. This second analysis confirmed what was found by the use of the single indicator of job mobility: Job mobility had no impact on conjugal quality in all three countries considered in this analysis.

This unexpected result leads us to propose several explanations. First, a large share of job-mobile individuals experienced their mobility before becoming parents, in a life-course stage in which they were either single or in a relatively new partnership. Because job mobility was associated with social mobility occurring in earlier stages of the profes-

sional career (Viry et al. 2008), it did not interact, in most cases, with the decrease of conjugal satisfaction usually associated with the transition to parenthood (Belsky/Pensky 1988; Cowan/Cowan 1992). Therefore, conjugal satisfaction may not have been strongly decreased by job mobility because couples that experienced it were not subject to the burdens associated with parenthood. This argument certainly does not explain the whole matter, as mobile individuals with children in the JobMob sample were not different than non-mobile parents. But let us again stress that they were relatively few and that they may have developed strategies to deal with the drawbacks of their situations.

A second explanation holds in the large proportion of job-mobile individuals having placed personal autonomy in the foreground, although this autonomy was not directly due to mobility practice (Schneider/Meil 2008). We have indeed good reason to think that a large part of mobile people did not become more independent in the situation of mobility because those couples had already developed individual autonomy. This was probably particularly the case for people who opted for weekend commuting and long-distance relationships. In these couples, in which both partners usually work, career disadvantages could be avoided (Limmer 2005). Because their independence was important, these persons probably considered their mobility less of a burden for their relationship. Again, this interpretation does not explain the whole matter, as mobile individuals in the JobMob sample emphasising conjugal closeness and time spent together were not different from the equivalent non-mobile group. These more cohesive couples may have chosen to commute long distances daily as one possible strategy to limit the burdens of mobility (Limmer 2005). In this way, they could still find a balance between occupational absence and family cohesion by choosing the form of mobility that is most adapted to their degree of autonomy.

One may likewise think that job-mobile people developed other strategies to adapt themselves and their families to their mobile way of life so that their couple cohesion, their social networks, and hereby the quality of their conjugal interactions were not markedly affected by mobility. The abilities of partners to communicate at a distance or the concentration on leisure activities with the family are some examples of such strategies. By a selection effect, one may thus expect that many couples who did not adapt themselves to the constraints caused by mobility stopped either their mobile living arrangement or their relationship. We can additionally think that the effects of the different factors previously highlighted as potentially influencing conjugal quality counterbalanced each other in the specific mobility arrangements of families. Let us take the case of long-distance relationships. This mobility form takes both partners' autonomy to an extreme. But at the same time, empirical research showed that this living arrangement was associated with the maintenance of both partners' dense personal networks (Schneider et al. 2002), which could partly compensate for the effect of personal autonomy on conjugal quality.

Finally, another explanation holds in the importance of the ways in which mobility has come into existence in specific families. From a life-course perspective, we hypothesized that various processes by which individuals become mobile coexisted, some stemming from strategic decisions made by actors who perceived themselves as having a high level of self-mastery, others imposed on individuals by the structural constraints of the environment (lack of jobs, lack of affordable accommodation near the workplace) or by

their network members (necessity of financially supporting the partner or the family, to abandon the idea of moving, and to commute to preserve the integration of the family within its social environment). We expected that these pathways to mobility, in turn, may have had consequences on conjugal quality, because individuals and their partners may have developed frustrations and misunderstandings if the process of becoming mobile could not be attributed to shared cultural meaning among spouses (Berger/Kellner 1964).

This expectation was actually confirmed by the data. In all three countries considered in this paper, the process of becoming mobile had an impact on conjugal quality, although in quite distinct ways. Interestingly, structurally enforced negative mobility was associated with greater conjugal quality than network-enforced negative mobility. In other words, individuals who perceived their experience of mobility as forced by the job market were actually better off in their conjugal interactions than those whose families and networks strongly intervened in the decision making. The impact of this process was rather strong and could not be called into question as it showed up in each of the three countries. Individuals mobile for structural reasons may have been able to deal with the burdens of mobility by attributing the negative consequences of mobility to the context rather than to themselves or to their partners. They may have also experienced mobility as a temporary living arrangement rather than as a permanent way of life. This may have helped them and their partners make sense of the current situation.

In Switzerland, network-enforced positive mobility was additionally clearly associated with higher conjugal satisfaction and less frequent conflict. That is, individuals who experienced with the partner and family a difficult decision-making process regarding mobility but who perceived their current mobility arrangement positively showed higher conjugal quality. In this situation, mobility was probably seen as the best possible compromise between work and family life (Vincent et al. forthcoming), and taking into account the interests of both partners, this reflected positively in the couple dynamics. Furthermore, various studies have shown that it was more the subjective feeling of equity in both partners' family investment than the real investment that influenced conjugal satisfaction (Kellerhals et al. 1988; Widmer et al. 2003). In this regard, mobile individuals for whom the decision was made collectively may have seen their job mobility as an investment for family per se (financial support), contributing to conjugal quality.

In Germany and Switzerland, opportunity-driven mobility was also clearly associated with higher conjugal satisfaction and lower conflict. Because mobility was the consequence of an optimizing calculus made by persons who had several options available, it was probably interpreted as a fruitful step in a career of professional development. In both countries, the careers of elites include spatial mobility, either within the country, from small towns to university areas and business places, or internationally within Europe or to the United States. The strong impediment to having various professional experiences beyond the place in which one grew up may have led several individuals to be mobile in the early stages of their careers, not because they did not find jobs in their birthplaces, but because they found better ones (or more promising ones in the long run of their careers) if they accepted being job-mobile. Occupational mobility as a contribution to self-development goes hand in hand with conjugal quality, which also contributes to the emphasis on the life course servicing the self in an individualistic twist. This is especially the case for individuals who are temporarily or more permanently childless, who significantly empha-

sise autonomy more than others in their conjugal interactions (Widmer et al. 2003). Overall, Germany and Switzerland presented similar results on the impact of mobility processes on conjugal quality. France was a special case, as no significant effect of opportunity-driven mobility could be found in the country. One may interpret that as a consequence of the more gendered division of labour in Germany and Switzerland. Indeed, the significant association between opportunity-driven mobility and high conjugal quality in these two national contexts concerned mainly men living with children (table not reported). The strong occupational investment of these fathers may have been more positively related to couple quality in countries characterized by family policies and social norms favouring an unequal division of labour, with women still carrying the main responsibility for childcare and participating in the job market far less.

The study presented here discusses some dimensions associated with job mobility effects on partnership. It has, nevertheless, several limitations. First, the JobMob data provided only limited measures of conjugal quality (two indicators). Additional indicators, such as various conjugal problems, conjugal instability, or coping strategies, would be necessary for a more in-depth examination of the dynamics of conjugal interactions. Second, there are no specific measures of conjugal cohesion, conjugal network density and network symmetry. This would have allowed to test the mediating effect of these variables on the relationship between job mobility and conjugal quality. In addition, the necessity of dealing with various life situations regarding mobility and living arrangements creates some categories that are represented by only very few cases, limiting the statistical power in multivariate analyses. Added to this, because of cross-sectional data, we cannot exclude that questions about the decision of becoming mobile made in the past may be post-hoc reconstructions that mobile individuals developed from family situations experienced at the time of the interview. Finally, one can wonder about the reliability of international comparisons in this kind of survey, because of the variability of some results across countries. The conjugal dissatisfaction is indeed strangely higher in France compared with the situation in the two other countries. Do we then measure the same concept across countries?

Finally, there are several open issues that should be dealt with by further empirical inquiries. First, the analyses are synchronic for the most part. Indeed, mobility forms and conjugal quality were measured at a single point in time. A better understanding of the lack of effect of structural positions certainly goes through a longitudinal panel survey, which would enable us to consider how previously non-mobile couples adapt their relationships to the demands of mobility. Longitudinal data would also allow to consider the possible long-term effects of past mobility practice on conjugal quality. Second, it would be helpful to produce a qualitative understanding of the specific strategies developed by some categories of couples to deal with their mobility.

These analysis dimensions must still be scrupulously studied, but our findings are nevertheless solid. Recurring forms of job-related spatial mobility had no effect on conjugal quality in all three countries considered in this analysis. Conjugal quality rather depended on the process by which the individual has become mobile. Lower quality of conjugal relations concerned mobile people who experienced decisions leading to mobility both negatively and collectively.

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